



Springtails or “Snowfleas”

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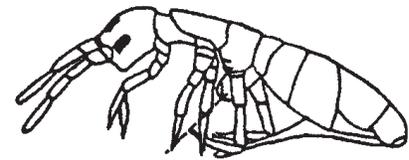
Introduction

The appearance of large numbers of minute jumping insects called springtails or “snow fleas” is common each winter and early spring in New Hampshire. They appear most often during warm periods when a thaw is in progress, congregating in large masses or piles near snow or at the edge of snow pools or slow-moving streams. They can number in the millions. When disturbed they often jump a short distance with the aid of a forked appendage attached to the end and underside of the abdomen that can be sprung in a downward movement to catapult the insect into the air (see drawing at left). The most commonly occurring springtail species in New Hampshire are either purplish or dark gray to black in color.

Springtails belong to a group of primitive insects known as Collembola. They feed mainly on decaying organic matter, such as rotting leaves and wood, dead worms, insects and other animals, as well as

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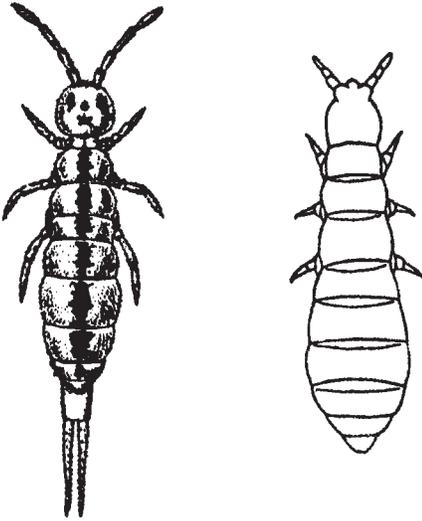


Side view showing the forked appendage.



Did You Know?

They feed mainly on decaying organic matter, such as rotting leaves and wood, dead worms, insects and other animals, as well as algae, fungi and lichens.



Dorsal view of two common springtails.

algae, fungi and lichens. They are primarily outdoor insects, but occasionally will invade buildings, where they can become a nuisance. Since they require moisture to survive, springtails are found in damp places such as under porches, near foundations, in window boxes, in flower pots, in basements or near plumbing leaks. Although they do not cause structural or material damage, they can become so numerous that they will cover walls and drapery once inside a building.

Control

Controlling sources of moisture, especially moist soil, is the best way to prevent an invasion inside a building. Preventing plumbing leaks and directing downspouts away from buildings to prevent wet spots next to the foundation will help avoid springtail problems. Ventilate all confined areas, such as under porches.

Outdoor populations are usually more of a curiosity than a problem. The sudden large numbers of springtails will disappear within a week, or as soon as the soil begins to dry out.

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About the Author

Dr. Alan T. Eaton, is an Extension Specialist in Entomology and a professor at the University of New Hampshire. Much of his work is on management of fruit pests and ticks.

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